

Merchant and Nuuanu Streets --
Honolulu Police Station
842 Bethel Street
Honolulu
Honolulu County
Hawaii

HABS No. HI-55 K

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2 HONLU,
18-K-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MERCHANT AND NUUANU STREETS COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS
HONOLULU POLICE STATION

HABS No. HI-55 K

Location: 842 Bethel Street, corner Merchant Street, City and County of Honolulu, Hawaii.
Zone 2, Sec. 1, Plat 02, Tax Key # 24.

Present Owner: City and County of Honolulu.

Present Occupant and Use: Real Property Assessment and Public Housing Divisions. Office and Service Use.

Significance: The Honolulu Police Station building is the second such structure to occupy the site, replacing the 1886 building. This later structure represents the police department's growth and reputation. At the time it was built in 1930, the Spanish colonial revival style structure was becoming an accepted style for public edifices in Honolulu.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION.

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1930-31. The Police Station was begun in 1930 and completed September 29, 1931. The Nuuanu Street addition was constructed in 1986. [Honolulu Star Bulletin, 9-30-1931 and Hawaii Architect, 5-1987.]
2. Architect: Louis E. Davis, a local architect, designed the building, as inscribed on a plaque hanging in the building's foyer.
3. Original and subsequent owners: City and County of Honolulu, continuously.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:
 - a. Builder, contractor: F. M. Dias.
 - b. Suppliers: The sandstone for the walls of the foyer came from the Oahu town of Waianae, the Roja Alicante marble came from France, and the doors were of Phillipine mahogany. [Honolulu Star Bulletin, 9-30-1931.]

5. Original plans and construction: The original building extended from Bethel to Nuuanu streets on Merchant. The complex massing indicates a careful composition, not a series of additions.

The vice squad, weights and measures, military police and shore patrol were in the basement, the receiving area, general offices, foot patrol, examiner of chauffeurs and traffic department were on the main floor, the jail was on the second floor, and district courtrooms and offices were on the top floor. [Honolulu Star Bulletin, 9-30-1931.]

6. Alterations and additions: The building received various repairs and minor renovations between 1965 and 1979, including a partial reroofing in 1967, and remodelling of office interiors. [Building permit 2-1-02-20/22/24, #'s 9444, 38751, 45837, 63870, 42446, 57044, 70236, 122888, 130771.] A three-story structure was added to the Nuuanu Street facade in 1986, in conjunction with the renovation of the existing structure, undertaken by Fred N. Sutter & Associates, Inc., Architects. The addition utilizes the same type of materials as the original structure and is compatible in scale.

B. Historical Context:

In 1834 King Kamehameha organized the first police force in the Hawaiian islands. This was only four years after the inception of London's first police force, and twelve years before that of any American city.

In 1845, the king appointed the first Marshal of the island, and sheriffs were appointed for each island. After counties were organized in 1905, sheriffs were elected for each county. In 1932, however, two celebrated murder cases with racist overtones necessitated a reorganization and more centralized control by the government. At that time Governor Lawrence Judd appointed the first Territorial Police Commission, which chose county chiefs of police. In the 1960s the "Home Rule" movement brought about a change by which county executive officers appointed police commissions, which then appointed police chiefs. [Honolulu Advertiser, 10-19-1939.]

In 1885 the Minister of the Interior under King Kalakaua purchased corner property at Bethel and Merchant Streets and began construction of a new Police Court building on the site. The Chinatown fire of 1886 destroyed the old King Street police station so all of the functions of that building were transferred to the nearly completed Merchant Street structure, a two-story brick building. The cell block was in the basement, the offices of the Marshal, Deputy Marshal, Police Justice and a detention area were on the ground floor. The courtroom was on the second floor. [Archives Honolulu

Building Task Force file TMK: 2-1-2-24.] In 1930 this building was demolished in order to construct the present structure on the site. This later police station cost \$235,000 and used eleven tons of Roja Alicante marble. The building was occupied on September 29, 1931. The Police Department ordered \$14,000 worth of metal furniture and equipment for its new building. [Thrum's Annual, 1931, p.119, and Honolulu Star Bulletin, 9-30-1931, p.11.]

During wartime, the first floor housed the Alien Property Custodian, which confiscated property owned by foreign citizens, beginning with the declaration of martial law on December 7, 1941. (It was this agency that closed the Yokohama Specie Bank across the street in 1941.)

The Police Department left the building in 1967. The Old Police Station, or Court Building as it was also known, continued to house the District Courts. The courts, in turn, were moved in 1983 and the building stood empty for three years in the mid-1980's while the city debated the building's future. After a 1985 plan to use it as the vehicle and driver licensing operations center was rejected following public objection, in 1985 the city decided to use the building for the city's Real Property Assessment and Public Housing Divisions. The building is presently undergoing renovation for such use. [Star Bulletin, 2-13-1985.]

Report prepared by Laura S. Alderman, Project Historian.

For background information on this downtown neighborhood, see HABS No. HI-55.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The building is an excellent example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. A large building, the Honolulu Police Station's mass is broken into smaller components and exhibits a concentration of details placed at significant locations to enrich the composition. The entrance portals are especially noteworthy because of their monumentality. The interiors are also of significance because of their original materials.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in excellent condition. It is undergoing rehabilitation at the present time.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The building measures 165'-0" along Merchant Street by about 103'. This is a two-and-a-half- and three-and-a-half-story building, essentially L-shaped in plan. The site slopes slightly in the makai direction, yielding a four-story elevation on that side. The three-and-a-half-story portion is at the northeast portion (Merchant and Bethel Streets); the two-and-a-half-story wing extends along Merchant Street toward Nuuanu Street. A new three-story addition has been built makai of the lower wing and increases the building's mass to the rear. At its highest point the building measures approximately 70'.

2. Foundations: not ascertained.

3. Walls: The walls are of concrete with a cream-colored stucco surface. The lower wall on the Merchant Street side is thicker than the upper wall to a height of 8'. A watertable separates the first floor from the basement level.

The building appears to have been designed as a series of carefully composed units and elevations. This can be seen with the Bethel Street facade tower and the symmetrical composition around the Merchant Street entrance. The Nuuanu Street termination of the two-and-a-half-story wing is semicircular wrapped by a stairway.

4. Structural system, framing: Combination of concrete post and beam and bearing wall construction.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: At the Nuuanu Street termination is a curved stairway wrapping a semicircular mass. The wall plane forms a rail for the stairway. A projecting concrete lanai with simple wrought-iron railing extends from the south wall of the building at the top floor. There is a small sculptured and corbeled balcony below the window in the Bethel Street elevator/stairway tower. An enclosed lanai is found on the Bethel Street facade above two former garage openings.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Primary focus is upon the Bethel and Merchant Street corner with its monumental classical portals and the Bethel Street tower. A more elaborate portal is situated on the Merchant Street Side in the two-and-a-half-story portion.

The principal entrance at the corner of Merchant and Bethel Streets has dual portals in the Spanish Classical style. Executed in terra cotta, the portals have pilasters with Corinthianesque capitals, double entablatures, and attic windows with broken segmental pediments flanked by scrolled brackets. The wood panel infills (10'-6" x 16'-6") have pairs of 2'-6" x 9'-0" paneled doors.

A more elaborate, but smaller, secondary entrance portal is located right of center on the Merchant Street facade. Also of terra cotta, its pilasters have decorative panels and Corinthianesque capitals. The entablature frieze also has decorative work. Scrolled brackets supported on the water table flank the portal. The attic of this portal has finials flanking a window opening which is contained within an elaborately detailed composition of scrolled broken pediment with central finial. The portal contains a paneled infill unit with a smaller door insert.

At the left side of the Bethel Street elevation is a small terra cotta portal which has been sealed with a stucco panel. The terra cotta jambs and head are splayed. Scrollwork surrounds a rectangular date panel with the numerals "1930." On the same facade, two semicircular arched openings have been altered. The roll-up door of the left unit has been removed and the opening has been stuccoed. The right-hand door has been replaced by a wood and glass doorway composition. These changes were a part of the 1986-87 renovation. Two wood panel doors in unarticulated openings are located on the curved stairway at the Nuuanu Street end. A new service door and garage door have been added on the Nuuanu Street facade with the 1986-87 renovation.

2. Windows, shutters: In the larger portions of the building are found uniformly spaced windows with unarticulated openings. All window units are steel and while the casement is the basic element, sizes and composition vary slightly. Steel units are of standard varieties. Top floor windows of the three-and-a-half-story portion are flanked by non-operable shutters.

Selected windows are covered with decorative wrought-iron grillwork. The choice of which openings are so adorned appears to have been determined solely on the basis of composition. The window above the elaborate Merchant Street portal has a decorative grille as does the window on the circular termination on Nuuanu Street. Two windows of the Bethel Street tower have simple iron grilles.

Concrete block screens cover some windows. The basement windows along Merchant Street have block screens of geometrical patterns. One high window of the tower has a screen with small fan-shaped openings. Atop this opening is an elaborate pediment supported by engaged spiral columns carried on pendants. A lower window of the tower has diamond-shaped openings in its screen. A large steel window unit (fixed sash) in the stairway tower faces onto a small balcony. Its opening is splayed and has a splayed, sculptured lintel.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The building has several roofs to correspond to its composite form. There is a combination of flat roofs with parapets and red mission-tile hip roofs. Some of the hips are tiled only on the perimeter. Flat roof portions have composition roofing.
- b. Cornices, eaves: There are coved and molded stucco cornices around the perimeter of the building.
- c. Towers: An elevator and stairway tower is located on the Bethel Street side adjacent to the principal entry. It extends slightly higher than the rest of the building mass into which it is absorbed. It has a low pyramidal roof topped with a flagpole set on a square base.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The interior of the building is undergoing renovation. While significant interior features are being retained, modern materials and partitions dominate in work areas. The original floor plans are not apparent beyond the public access areas although the first floor and third floors retain the size and shapes, and most finishes, of the principal rooms.
2. Stairways: A one-and-a-half-story entrance hall on the ground floor at the Merchant/Bethel Streets corner contains a stairway to the first floor. Access to the second and third floors is via an open core stairway contained in the tower visible on Bethel Street. The stairways have red tile treads and glazed painted tile risers. An elevator adjacent to the stairway serves the second and third floors from the elevated first floor.
3. Flooring: Concrete slab floors. Entrance hall floor is of red tile in square and elongated octagonal shapes. The first floor floor is of red brick tile in a herringbone pattern. Other floors have modern asphalt surfaces.

4. Wall and ceiling finishes: Walls are plastered and painted. The entrance hall walls have a veneer of travertine and granite (laid in horizontal bands) with a slate base. The first floor and stairway have a glazed painted tile wainscot in abstract geometrical and curvilinear patterns. New partitions are found in most of the building. The ceiling of the entrance hall is of wood coffering. The main room on the first floor has a ceiling of applied moldings and abstract painted decoration. The main room on the third floor has a ceiling of large concrete beams. Form marks are visible on the beams and ceilings and the surfaces are painted in abstract patterns. Hung ceilings are found throughout most of the building.
5. Openings: The only openings of major significance are the broad pointed-arch openings surrounding the main hall on the first floor.
6. Decorative features and trim: The entrance hall has a Churrigueresque cornice below the coffered ceiling. Trim around the elevator on the first floor is of glazed painted tile. The octagonal columns of the first-floor main room have similarly tiled wainscot. Second-floor trim appears to have been removed or covered. The third floor has octagonal columns with travertine veneer. On this level, trim is of veined black marble.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The Honolulu Police Station is a part of the Merchant Street National Register district. This building occupies (with its adjacent parking lot) the entire block bounded by Merchant, Bethel, Nuuanu Streets and the Nimitz Highway. It extends the full length of the block from Bethel to Nuuanu on the makai side of Merchant Street. The building is positioned along the Merchant Street property line.
2. Landscaping: There is a row of trees planted in the sidewalk area along Merchant Street. Along Bethel Street there is an area of planting between the sidewalk and the building. The parking lot behind the building is surrounded by a planting area.

In this description, local designation is given for orientation. "Mauka" means mountain direction, "Makai" means sea direction, "Diamond Head" means in the direction of Diamond Head crater, "Ewa" means in the direction of the town of Ewa (opposite Diamond Head direction).

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

From the Bishop Museum Photograph Collection:

Files: "Geography. Oahu. Honolulu Streets. Merchant S.
pre-1900", "Geography. Oahu. Honolulu Streets. Merchant S.
1900-".

Album 12, Page 30, "C.B. Mus. 104, Gartley 196. Merchant Street,
Honolulu, ca. 1890?"

Baker, Ray Jerome, Scenes of Old Hawaii. #31179.

Hawaii State Archives Files:

"Police Department, 1920s"

"Police Department, 1930s"

"Police Department, early"

B. Primary and Unpublished Sources:

Maps: Lion Fire Insurance Company, 1879. Bishop Museum Map
Collection.

B. F. Dillingham Fire Insurance Company for Board of Fire
Underwriters of Honolulu, 1900, and 1906 corrected to
1911. Bishop Museum Map Collection and Hawaii State
Archives.

Sanborn Map Company, 1914 uncorrected (Library of Congress,
Washington, D.C.), 1914 corrected to 1925, 1927
uncorrected, and 1927 corrected to 1951. Bishop Museum Map
Collection and Hawaii State Archives.

Downtown Improvement Association Research Department,
3-9-1964. Hawaii State Archives.

Tax Records, Tax Assessor's office, 842 Bethel Street, Honolulu,
Hawaii. Records for "Zone 2, Sec. 1, Plat 02, #24".

Building Permits, Municipal Building, Honolulu, Hawaii. #'s 9444,
38751, 45837, 63879, 42446, 57044, 70236, 122888, 130771.

Hawaii State Archives "Historic Buildings Task Force: File #TMK
2-1-02-24. University of Hawaii architecture student's 1967 report on
the Honolulu Police Station.

C. Secondary and Published Sources:

Honolulu Star Bulletin

9-30-1931, p.13
10-21-1938, p.3
10-19-1939, p.1

Honolulu Advertiser

5-6-1930, p.3
1-16-1931, p.1
11-10-1931, p.1
10-21-1938, p.1
10-19-1939, p.1
7-18-1967, p.B1

Scott, Edward B. The Saga of the Sandwich Islands, vol. I. Crystal Bay, Lake Tahoe, Nev.: The Sierra-Tahoe Publishing Co. 1968.

Sutter, Fred N. "Restoration of the Old Honolulu Police Station."
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Thrum, Thomas. Hawaiian Almanac and Annual. Honolulu: Black & Auld Printers, 1885, p.55; 1931, p.119.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was jointly sponsored by First American Title Co., Historic Hawaii Foundation, and the National Park Service. Recorded under the direction of Kenneth L. Anderson, Chief of HABS, and Alison K. Hoagland, HABS Historian, the project was completed during the summer of 1987 at the Honolulu field office. Project supervisor was Robert C. Giebner (University of Arizona); project historian was Laura S. Alderman (Washington, D.C.); architectural foreman was J. Scott Anderson (Washington, D.C.); and architectural technicians were Coy E. Burney (University of Maryland), Kenneth R. Imoehl (University of Arizona), and Michel A. van Ackere (Brown University).

ADDENDUM TO:
MERCHANT & NUUANU STREETS, HONOLULU POLICE STATION
(Honolulu Police Station)
842 Bethel Street
Honolulu
Honolulu County
Hawaii

HABS HI-55-K
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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
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